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FEATURES — 175TH ANNIVERSARY

Documentary reveals Winchester's close call with being named 'Harmony'

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

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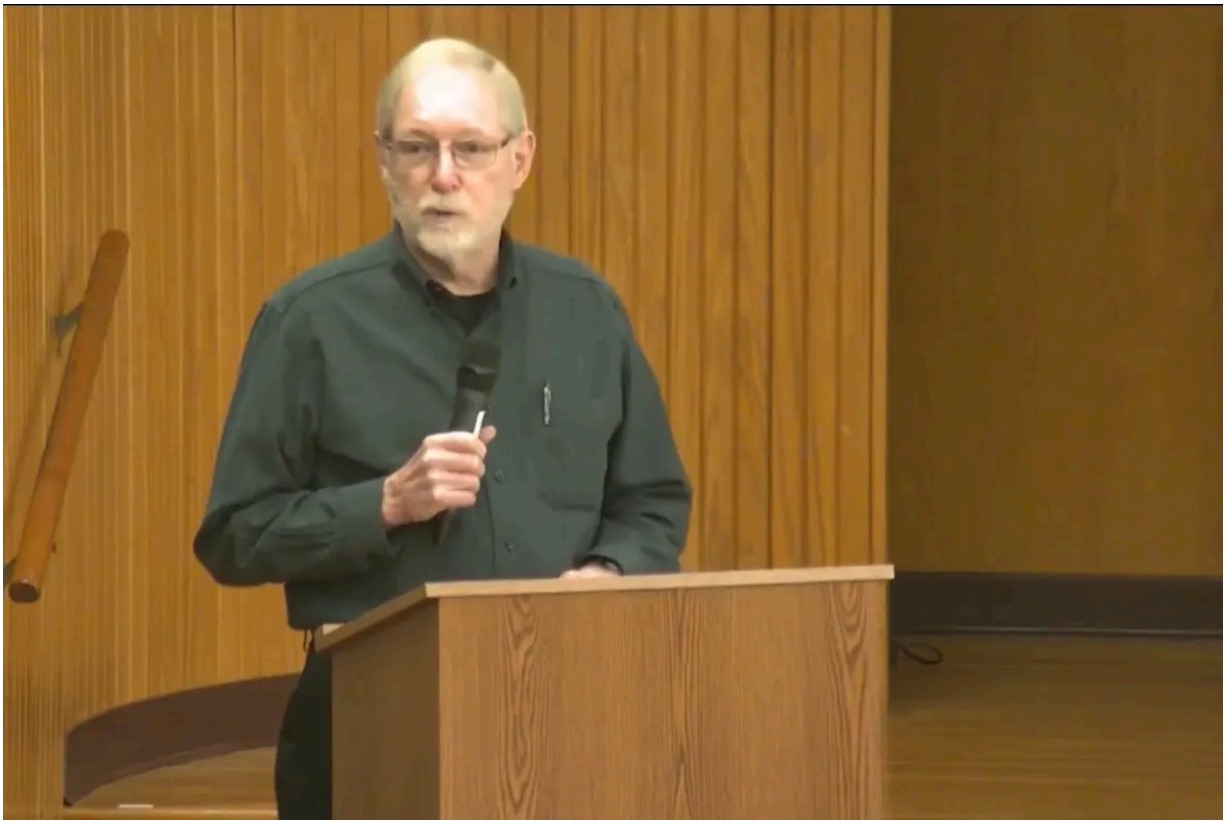

Filmmaker Peter Engeldrum speaks during the world premiere of his documentary "The Changing Shape of Winchester" at the Jenks Center on Nov. 12. COURTESY PHOTO/PETER ENGELDRUM

The Winchester Historical Society marked the town's 175th anniv
with the world premiere of "The Changing Shape of Winchester,"

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documentary examining how the community's boundaries evolved since its 1850 incorporation.

Filmmaker Peter Engeldrum presented his latest work to a full house at the Jenks Center, concluding a year of programming honoring Winchester's founding. Program committee chair Hilda Wong-Doo described the film as "the cap off of all of our activities that we've planned for the 175th birthday of Winchester."

The 33-minute documentary traces Winchester's origins as a breakaway from Woburn, beginning with South Woburn residents' push for autonomy in the late 1840s. Engeldrum's research showed that the town nearly received a different name.

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Peter G. Engeldrum presented 'The Colonel,' a documentary about William Parsons Winchester, above, at the Jenks Center in April. COURTESY PHOTO/PETER ENGELDRUM

"Several committees put forth a series of names, including Harmony, Lyndon, Alton, Winthrop, Wyoming, Mystic, Sheffield, South Woburn, Waterville and Columbus," the film's narration states.

Winchester was chosen after Boston businessman William Parsons Winchester offered $3,000 "as a compliment paid to his family name."

The legislation creating Winchester moved quickly through the Massachusetts legislature, with Gov. William Parsons signing the incorporation April 30, 1850. Forming the new town cost $484.52, or roughly $20,000 in today's dollars.

"The legislature was controlled by the Whigs," said Engeldrum. "South Woburn had a strong Whig influence."

Engeldrum documented three later boundary changes: an 1873 transfer of 67 acres to Woburn for a reservoir that created a V-shaped notch in Winchester's northern border; a 1956 annexation of 27.5 acres from Medford; and a 1964 adjustment with Lexington affecting about five acres. The changes left Winchester roughly 35 acres smaller than its original 6.2 square miles.

"The most surprising aspect of the town's boundaries was the fact that the original petitioners wanted a different northern boundary, and more area for the town," Engeldrum told the Winchester News in a follow-up email. "I had never seen that in any of the descriptions of the incorporation."

The film highlights 18 corner monuments installed in 1899 by the Massachusetts Topographical Survey Commission, many marked by granite posts 4 to 5 feet high.

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Engeldrum and video assistant Bill Swanton located and photographed these markers, some tucked in conservation land and the Middlesex Fells Reservation.

"Most of Winchester's corners are marked with granite posts 4 to 5 feet high, with a 'W' chiseled on the face towards Winchester, and a letter for the adjacent town on another face," according to the film.

Winchester's boundary markers were rediscovered in Mystic Lake by residents Peter G. Engeldrum and William Swanton.

COURTESY PHOTOS/PETER ENGELDRUM & WILLIAM SWANTON

Engeldrum thanked contributors during a post-screening discussion, including Sean Broderick from Winchester's Engineering Department, narrator Allan Eyden and reference archivist Ellen Knight. Wong-Doo praised Engeldrum's dedication, noting he and his wife Carol Keller "are always learning something new and with endless energy."

The former color scientist and award-winning filmmaker has served on the Winchester Historical Society board and the Cultural Council. He offered attendees coordinates and directions for finding boundary mark themselves, encouraging "perambulating" — walking the town's b

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required by a 1651 Massachusetts colony law mandating inspections every five years.

The society plans a holiday gathering Dec. 7 at the Sanborn House. Non-members were encouraged to join and contribute to preserving Winchester's history.

Will Dowd is a Massachusetts journalist who covers municipal government and community life for Winchester News. He previously co-founded the Marblehead Current and now runs The Marblehead Independent, a reader-funded digital newsroom.

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community

The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: The Winchester community came together last week at the Griffin Museum of Photography for the inaugural Black History and Culture Celebration, an evening filled with music, student creativity, and powerful messages about equity, unity, and the enduring legacy of Black

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FEATURES

Winchester residents share more snow photos

Well, Winchester, we made it through the weekend with only a coating of snow that amounted to nothing on Sunday afternoon. But during the Feb. 22-23 blizzard, Winchester News once again asked residents to send their snow photos. And here is what we received! Solmaz Amirnazmi said her daughters and

NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY | STAFF WRITER

March 2, 2026

FEATURES

Winchester Community Music School set to expand, upgrade

The big events in Winchester Community Music School always take place in Nichols Performance Hall. With the school and its performances' growing in popularity, the hall and many of its amenities are due for an upgrade. The performance hall is one of the main areas that the school seeks to

TAVISHI CHATTOPADHYAY | CORRESPONDENT

February 26, 2026

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By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents "Chicago: Teen Edition," a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. Set in the 1920s, this iconic production is sure to leave the audience wanting more. Performances will

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EVENTS

Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents 'Syldason: You Are Welcome Here'

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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Rep. Michael Day helps House colleagues pass sweeping energy affordability bill

The following was submitted by the Office of Rep. Michael S. Day: Rep. Michael S. Day and

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his colleagues in the House of Representatives recently passed energy affordability legislation that would result in over $9 billion in savings for utility ratepayers over the next 10 years. The bill maintains critical

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as of Jan. 25, 2025 — Source: Massachusetts Criminal History Systems Board License to carry firearms Firearms identification card Winchester and Marblehead are the focus communities. Peers selected based on comparable population size, demographics and suburban

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

March 4, 2026

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